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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3688
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5841
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3549
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3408
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4083
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001404

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; MED

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2019

TAGS: AMED KFLU PGOV SOCI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: NUMBER OF DEATHS FROM FLU RISING

REF: ASHGABAT 1391

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Many local employees and Embassy contacts on November 2 had stories about someone they knew having died from the flu. A 26 year-old pregnant woman, the neighbor of a local guard, died this weekend. An Embassy officer's housekeeper said that three children in her son's kindergarten class had also died. Both the local guard and the housekeeper are keeping their children home from school. Another Embassy officer talked to six people who each knew someone who died, and he himself saw an ambulance arrive twice at his apartment building over the weekend. In addition, local Embassy employees heard that someone died at Central Hospital, which is the Turkish-run hospital. UNICEF was estimating, as of November 2, that 20 people in Turkmenistan had died from the flu. The Turkish Embassy, which is also tracking the flu to the extent they can, estimated that 35 people had died.

¶2. (SBU) It is obvious from just walking around Ashgabat that people are concerned. Embassy officers have witnessed numerous people in stores, markets, and on the street wearing masks. One Embassy officer saw an employee at Yimpas, the Turkish-run department store, wearing a mask. The store owners' decision to allow employees to wear masks while working is a tacit admission of a serious health problem.

¶3. (C) Even the government has been forced to admit that there is a problem. The flu epidemic has been covered on local television, and a local embassy employee said that her aunt heard on television that 70-100 cases of the flu were "really bad." The state-run newspaper Neytralniy Turkmenistan had an article on November 2 about "How to Protect Yourself from ORZ," with ORZ being defined as Very Widespread Disease (Ochen' Rasprostranyennoye Zabolebaniye), the symptoms of which are a sore throat, runny nose, achiness, and high temperature. The article also mentioned that children seemed to be especially susceptible as well as people who suffer from chronic ailments.

14. (C) Turkmen who are trying to protect themselves are not getting much help, however. Pharmacies have almost run out of masks, and when they are available they are very expensive. One local employee said he found a mask for 6.60 manat (approximately \$2.50). A local contact said that the ointment which many Turkmen put on their noses to prevent colds and flu now costs about 7.40 manat (approximately \$3.50), which she thought was ridiculously expensive. Not helping is that companies such as Petronas, the Malaysian oil company, are requiring their employees to come to work, even if they are sick.

15. (C) COMMENT: Turkmen who have access to information about other countries, either through the Internet or satellite television, know that in Russia and Ukraine, for example, schools are being closed and public officials are making announcements about H1N1, and they are frustrated that their government is not doing the same for them. The problem is that the Turkmen Government does not admit that anything bad happens in their country, to the extent that doctors are pressured to diagnose all cases as colds, not as the flu.

END COMMENT.

CURRAN